

Your Guide to the Bands of RFT's Music Showcase

By Various

June 5, 2014

It's a new record for the *Riverfront Times*, everybody. Write an "88" down in the books — that's the number of talented musical acts performing in the 2014 RFT Music Showcase. Each year we spend the first Saturday in June celebrating the bands and artists who provide the soundtrack to life in St. Louis, and this year's event is set to be our biggest ever.

It also marks the first time the showcase will be held in the Grove, along Manchester Avenue, and that's pretty exciting too. New beginnings have their own energy to them, and the bars and venues on that vibrant strip could easily provide the perfect backdrop to some of your best memories this summer — memories of fun and singing and dancing as your soon-to-be-new-favorite musicians play their hearts out.

In your hands is a comprehensive guide to get you started on finding those favorites. If you are still reading this intro, you are focusing on the wrong part of this article. Move along now — you have some 10,000 words' worth of St. Louis' finest to learn about. Read up, and we'll see you

ATOMIC COWBOY LOUNGE

11 P.M. Parisian

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Eclectic)

Safety Words, the now-defunct, sample-heavy duo of Sean Price and Ian Jones, was a glorious, otherworldly novelty; Jones' solo work as Parisian took his love of atmospheric beats to new, oftentimes darker, depths. His

debut EP, *Those Emotions Ran High*, was dense and ambient, but still largely beat-driven. Last year's *Daul Kim* EP came from a seemingly more morbid place. Inspired by the journal entries of a South Korean model found hanged in her Paris apartment, Parisian took Kim's crises of identity and channeled them into amorphous, skittering compositions. — *Christian Schaeffer*

MIDNIGHT Wax Fruit

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Dance)

Wax Fruit's body of keyboards pushes fire through speakers in strict timing while sultry femme vocals build underneath. The duo carefully slithers around synth-pop, sounding somewhat menacing, albeit danceable. This might be the B-side of a long-lost '70s sci-fi film soundtrack — a song only heard in the background at some post-apocalyptic night club. Wax Fruit's live show feels equally lo-fi, with a penchant for intentional hiss and hum, which is fitting, because both heads behind the band come from a background in harsh noise. Songs end with abrupt howls and, sometimes, tonal chaos, shredding any semblance of careful wave. Recommended for the goth who is too lazy for makeup but hip enough for black vinyl gloves. —*Joseph Hess*

1 A.M. Black James

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Dance)

Burn your banjos and cram your clarinets: The Black James of 2014 is not the witchy woman you first saw singing murder ballads. Jennifer McDaniel seems to be in a continual state of evolution, and even her official releases refuse to stay in one place. 2012's *im A mirAcle* was a collage of knotty, glitchy, dubby beats mixed in with twisted Americana. These days, McDaniel is most often found behind a sampler as she corrals footwork-inspired beats and her own entrancing vocals. So don't go to a Black James show expecting the same thing you saw last time, but if you're especially lucky, she'll bring her dancers/hula-hoopers with her.— *Christian Schaeffer*

BAD DOG Bar & Grill

3 P.M. Dad Jr.

Nominated for: Best Hard Rock

Dad Jr.'s brand of rock is definitely "hard," as in, "hard-to-play." At times, the band's gutter-rock guitars feel more prog than punk, and the drums come packed with busy beats. But the band pulls it off without any significant hitches. The songs feel tongue-in-cheek, as if the band's members don't give a shit, but they're not fooling anyone — tunes this succinct and perfectly played don't come without hours of practice. This

band is for the kid who never grew up — the kid whose mom played *Raw Power* by the Stooges to her unborn child while it was still in the womb and unable to escape the rock & roll. — *Joseph Hess*

4 P.M. Shut In

Nominated for: Best Hard Rock

Everything about Shut In is cranked up to twelve, including vocalist Chris Bacott's desperate howls behind the mic and the heavy-handed beats crawling out from behind the band's tonal wall of guitars. This power trio maybe takes the word "power" too literally, but there's plenty of song to be had within the noise. Shut In tends to rail on riffs ad infinitum, but that's not to say its use of repetition is boring — quite the opposite. Bacott and company know when to release a song into the wild, only to wrangle the sum of its parts into catchy, heavy rock music. Highly recommended for music nerds who believe 1988 to 1994 were the only years worth living. — *Joseph Hess*

5 P.M. Kenshiro's

Nominated for: Best Garage Rock

With devil-may-care guitar riffage and a rhythm section that's strapped in tight because it's about to hurl itself off a cliff, Kenshiro's is a punk band

with a distinctly St. Louis sound. Guitarist Julio Prato isn't afraid to solo (and he knows his classic-rock shredders as well as he knows his post-rock switch-flippers), bassist Antonio Leone loves a good, steady groove, and drummer Joe Bayne digs those jazzy little fills before getting back to what he and the band do best: bash their garage-rock brains out. If you're looking for a band to make you fall in love with punk again, Kenshiro's has a proposal: Put down your PBR and rock harder. — *Roy Kasten*

6 P.M. Wild Hex

Nominated for: Best Garage Rock

Toddlers were among the Record Store Day revelers at Apop Records this year, pounding the sky and dancing to the bands outside. It was fairly innocent until the Wild Hex set, when the kiddos picked up extinguished cigarettes and previously drained beer bottles from the pavement and enthusiastically mimicked drinking and smoking while strumming serious air guitar. Wild Hex corrupted these developing minds with the pure power of thrashing, frantic rock & roll. The band's latest album, *You're Gonna Get It*, was released by Hexian member and proprietor of Don't Touch My Records Gabe "The Babe" Karabell. Currently, Wild Hex is working on an album slated for release later this month, and recorded by Jason Hutto at Smokin' Baby Studios. Won't someone think of the children?— *Jenn DeRose*

7 P.M. Black Panties

Nominated for: Best Rock

Black Panties is a snotty punk riddle wrapped in leather and drenched in PBR. Originating as a one-man guitar assault, the project now most frequently evolves into a full-fledged band, complete with a human microphone stand and a rotating cast of St. Louis' independent music community. Donning a leather jacket, black ski mask and cool shades, the group's ever-mysterious frontman reeks of sarcasm as he sings songs like "I Don't Care About the Punx" and "Piece of Shit." With several outstanding recordings and a few rowdy tours across the Midwest and East Coast under its belt, Black Panties has proven it is a force that can hold its own both on the turntable and on the stage. — *Josh Levi*

8 P.M. Beauty Pageant

Nominated for: Best Noise

Beauty Pageant huffs the dying breath of arena rock. Imagine the peak of your favorite cock-rock band — the last 30 seconds of the set, when the guitars go haywire while the drummer winds up for one final hit. Beauty Pageant takes the ugliest part of rock & roll — the showy, masculine solos — and makes a mockery of it all. Mr. Ben leads with shrill riffage under David Burnett's wobbly synth, crafting a wide tonal range that fills the ears with

swamp water. You might recognize Blyre Cpanx from her busy nights performing burlesque, but here she helps the band to self-destruct, making this noise even punker than punk rock. — *Joseph Hess*

9 P.M. Pink Sock

Nominated for: Best Hardcore

Pink Sock makes a show out of self-destructing, and although it logically should have imploded by now, the band still pulls at the tendons of punk rock in St. Louis. For a band born in 2009 of equal parts parody and performance art, hardcore seems like an unlikely destination. Vocalist Travis Hanrahan tends to mangle himself over stage gear and angry bandmates, but ultimately his scream — as skin crawling as can be — propels the songs atop scattershot blast beats. The whole package feels honest, lacking the clean dressing most modern punks tend to wear. — *Joseph Hess*

10 P.M. Little Big Bangs

Nominated for: Best Rock

We've reached an age where most up-and-coming bands don't remember a world without Nirvana. Some young rockers may even have been born after Kurt Cobain shuffled off this mortal coil and left behind an impossibly tall

shadow. And so it goes that Little Big Bangs, one of the best of a crop of early-twenties rock bands, bears traces of grunge but pays no slavish devotion to the subgenre. Last year's self-titled LP showed how the band's trio of singers — Eric Boschen, Ryan Macias and Lucy Dougherty, joined by drummer Drew Gowran — can wrangle the best from punk, pop and sludge-rock into something that is animated by static, strings and raw power. — *Christian Schaeffer*

11 P.M. The Conformists

Nominated for: Best Experimental

A purveyor of rock both chopped and warped, the Conformists' sets tend to play out like a series of musical inside jokes, but not necessarily for fun — the band shows what an alternate future might look like had the Jesus Lizard and Melvins rose to mainstream fame. But even in that context, the Conformists would still be a sideshow. Songs hit with considerable heft, feeling massive and heavy without the masculine pandering of modern metal. Drummer Pat Boland brings a surgeon's precision to the kit, matching the band's texture with sharp, specific beats while both guitar and bass occupy bold tones within wiry riffs. Repetition is present, but it's mostly meant as a tool to confuse, and before the listener catches on to the act, the band has moved on. Recommended for the A.D.D.-addled child within us all. — *Joseph Hess*

MIDNIGHT Everything Went Black

Nominated for: Best Hardcore

Everything Went Black, and it never went back. You could interpret that (accurately) as a bad joke, or you could see it as a commentary on the band's commitment to metallic hardcore. Formed in 2009, EWB has only become more vicious with time. Frontman Brandon Hoffman has the lungs of a man three times his physical stature, and the remainder of the quintet has road-tightened into a national-caliber band. The group has often drawn comparisons to iconic hardcore veteran Converge; today, the similarity has as much to do with Everything Went Black's stamina and energy as its stylistic choices. — *Ryan Wasoba*

1 A.M. Fister

Nominated for: Best Metal

Phil Anselmo wears this band's T-shirt. What else do you really need to know? Tour dates with Pallbearer, a split EP with Portland's Norska and a spot on NYC's first-rate Martyrdoom Fest this July are only part of Fister's impressive résumé. The band's sound is an intricate mix of doom, doom and vomit-drenched doom, wherein Godzilla drums, chainsaw guitars and speaker-melting bass tones are all used more like weapons than instruments. It's the perfect soundtrack to something like a plane crashing

into the Andes — and if you can't handle it, you'd probably be the first one to be eaten. — *Rick Giordano*

THE BOOTLEG INDOOR STAGE AT ATOMIC COWBOY

3 P.M. Pet Rock: the Musical

Nominated for: Best Psych

There are jam bands and then there are bands that jam. Pet Rock: the Musical is most definitely the latter. That said, the trio of guitarist John Parker, bassist Justin Pitonak and drummer Donnie O'Laughlin could very well appeal to the spaced-out masses — who've proven themselves willing to lose their focus and their hearing to the likes of Mogwai — especially if said masses simply surrender to how good a wall of sludge can feel, even when blasted through the shittiest of DIY P.A.s. Pay attention to Pet Rock: The Musical's sound and you'll always hear melodies fighting like hell to break through. — *Roy Kasten*

4 P.M. Breakmouth Annie

Nominated for: Best Punk

After gigging around for the last couple of years, Breakmouth Annie just recently had its official coming-out party via its first recording, a split seven-inch with the Winchester (Throwing Things Records). The tunes are

fast, gritty and heavy, and they drum up the spirit of genuine pre-Blink-182 pop-punk. Singer Bob Monroe's earnest, barbed-wire howl cuts through the thick wall of unmistakable Les Paul distortion, making these songs stick in you like a fishing hook — and it's easier to just leave them in your head and flounder around than to try to force them out. — *Michael Dauphin*

5 P.M. Better Days

Nominated for: Best Punk

Don't go into a Better Days show thinking that the punk foursome took its name from a second-rate Bruce Springsteen song. The better days that this band yearns for seem to be the ones when melodic, charging hardcore was the punk flavor du jour; Youth of Today, 7 Seconds and Dag Nasty are clearly the band's most overt influences. There's much more than throwback-punk at work here, though, and 2012's *Good Luck Tonight* EP makes that clear with Kevin Tomorrow's bouncing bass lines and Chris Vela's impassioned vocals suggesting that the better days in question are the ones right in front of us. Look for the band's *Nope* seven-inch to drop this summer c/o Encapsulated Records. — *Christian Schaeffer*

6 P.M. Quaere Verum

Nominated for: Best Metal

Quaere Verum is Latin for "to seek the truth." In the spirit of honesty, this band is not for everybody. Metal purists may balk at the group's prettier, post-rockier passages, while the band's gruffer moments can harsh those looking to zone out on atmosphere. Quaere Verum is a band for the open-minded, but not one limited to the cerebral listener. The weight of the group's breakdowns can be felt in the gut; the drama in its song structures can affect your heart rate. Few bands capture the spirit of their progressive influence as well as Quaere Verum. Even fewer do so without the compromises that come with the "prog" tag — in other words, you don't have to wait through a six-minute flute solo to get to the good stuff. — *Ryan Wasoba*

7 P.M. Laika

Nominated for: Best Emo/Post-Hardcore

Several local bands are now accepting the once-shunned classification of "emo," but Laika seems to be owning it in the most punk-rock way. The young quartet fits the bill, all knotty and mathy and finger-tappy. (It's 2014; can we start saying "angular" again yet?) But these kids are as scrappy as they come, applying caffeinated energy to oddly mature influences. Once-forgotten bands like Circle Takes the Square and Bear vs. Shark are fitting references, likely featured on these youngins' iPods. As evidenced by its well-received opening slot for Tera Melos last fall, Laika's sets are

already semi-vulgar displays of rawness and vulnerability. It's only a matter of time until the crowds catch up and turn Laika shows into loud, fast, group-therapy sessions. — *Ryan Wasoba*

8 P.M. Alan Smithee

Nominated for: Best Emo/Post-Hardcore

Once, when directors hated their movies, they'd release them under the pseudonym "Alan Smithee." (Now they just release them to Netflix.) The only thing St. Louis band Alan Smithee likely hates about its oeuvre is that it's not loud enough, because titanic, screaming, shredding noise-metal can never be loud enough. Alan Smithee doesn't play metal so much as it punishes it for the sake of all our sins. With crushingly cathartic vocal howls, mathematically advanced riffage, a brutalizing rhythm section and songs that are admirably concise in their attack, Alan Smithee takes its take-no-prisoners sound seriously. — *Christian Schaeffer*

9 P.M. Heavy Horse

Nominated for: Best Emo/Post-Hardcore

Heavy Horse is heavy indeed; the trio takes the raw-throated vitriol of hardcore and channels it through the structure-blurring methods of post-rock. The songs on 2013's *A Dialogue Between Us* can be slinky and

sludgy ("Never Forgotten, Always Changed") or take the form of a pneumatic squall ("Tomahawk"). Members Jordan Lake (guitar), Seth Rodgers (bass) and Dominick Valli (drums) share vocal duty, and when their voices (and instruments) combine, the full weight of this project is felt viscerally. With a new record due out soon, Heavy Horse intends to keep making music that is as hard and heavy as it is nimble and spry. —

Christian Schaeffer

10 P.M. Search Parties

Nominated for: Best New Band

Elliott Pearson and Alex Petrone first landed on the scene in 2010 with their band Great Outdoors. That Best New Band nominee shed its leaves and left Pearson and Petrone to rake up the mess, bagging up what they could salvage to form Search Parties. Pearson rendered his wilted emotions unto Search Parties, and the music was weighed out on a grander scale. Search Parties' aural heft belies its indie-rock tagline. Pearson calls out with an arid vocal tone, which can turn perceptively humid in the blink of a verse. Dylan Doughty inputs staccato key arrangements that strike through the veil of Pearson's elastic range. Danny Newgent's guitar tones manifest heady textures and coat the band in a drowsy haze of reverb. Petrone once again takes to a drum kit to coordinate fastidious rhythmic arrangements that keep pace with Chris Garner's bass and the band's live violinist, Gina

Eygenhuysen. The final product is at once familiar and fresh, foreshadowing good things for the young group. — *Blair Stiles*

11 P.M. Bad Dates

Nominated for: Best Rock

The self-proclaimed "south city bad boys for love" that compose Bad Dates have been steamrolling through town with a tongue-in-cheek brand of dirty rock & roll for the past two years. If you are searching for some of the catchiest guitar solos in the city, then look no further, and with the recent addition of local drum veteran Bassamp, the band will only become more depraved and ear-wormy. Seize the opportunity to get whipped up in a frenzy as Bad Dates' fresh, hungry take on a classic sound coats the walls of a dive bar near you. — *Jimmy Eberle*

MIDNIGHT Bassamp & Dano

Nominated for: Best Punk

Say what you want about this group — composed of some of the goofiest, most fun-loving, beer-swilling punks in St. Louis — but don't you dare question its patriotism. This is the type of punk rock for anyone aching to get in a good round of hungover wiffleball or awkwardly make out in the back of a pickup truck. Over the past four years of shows and music videos

and hilariously catchy punk-rock tunes, the band has proven time and time again that the only thing it takes seriously is an unrelenting love for America and everything that makes up a good barbecue. — *Jimmy Eberle*

THE BOOTLEG OUTDOOR STAGE AT ATOMIC COWBOY

2 P.M. Lamar Harris

Nominated for: Best Jazz

The most old-school of jazz purists probably wouldn't call the music of Lamar Harris "jazz." Luckily for those of us not so hung up on labels, the same eclecticism and innovative edge that may alienate traditionalists results in a distinctive, soulful blend of electronica, jazz, afrobeat and a laundry list of other styles. Despite the enormous range of influences he incorporates, the music of the immensely talented horn player — who also goes by the moniker DJ Nune (pronounced "noo-nee") when he's performing as a DJ — is always focused, purposeful and usually even danceable. If you dig what he has done so far, be on the lookout for *The Shawn Carter Jazz Suite*, a collaboration between Harris and fellow nominees the People's Key, to be released this summer. — *Nick Horn*

3 P.M. Stonechat

Nominated for: Best Indie Pop

Collinsville, Illinois, trio Stonechat hits many of the touchstones of the math-rock subgenre. Herky-jerk, interlocking riffs spiked with bouts of dissonance? Check. Unconventional time signatures? Check. Drums that sound like they've been shoved down a flight of stairs? Maybe, but the staircase would have to be built by an obsessive-compulsive master architect to match the controlled chaos of Charles Nehr's playing. Lyrics fit for a comic book? Check, complete with said comic book accompanying the band's new EP, *BACCO*. But how many math-rock groups feature a carnival organ? Newest member John Beabout's cartoonish instrument often stands in sharp sonic contrast to Sean Ballard's springy guitar, but his playing complements each spidery buildup and noisy breakdown perfectly, with the final result coalescing into smart songs that pack prog structures into pop run times. — *Bob McMahon*

4.P.M. Last to Show First to Go

Nominated for: Best Americana

Last to Show First to Go defies categorization. The band expertly shifts from folk to alt-country to rock during any concert, on any album and even during any song. It's a lot of ground to cover, but singer/guitarist Bredon Jones' lyrics about life's messes tie everything together. Under the layers of guitar, cello, percussion, harmonica and trumpet, Jones' words offer

sadness, cautionary tales and doubt without being dreary. It's transcontinental, thoughtful road-trip stuff, and at its heart, it gets at what

"Americana" means after all. — *Allison Babka*

5 P.M. Bear Hive

Nominated for: Best Indie Rock

New-wavey indie-pop band Bear Hive has both kinds of chemistry: organic and synthetic. Formed through high school friendship, Chris Phillips, Nate Heininger and Joel Burton sound like three guys bonding over a love of Echo & the Bunnymen and Depeche Mode records. They also synthesize everything else they just happen to think will make for a good song. On the EP *A Mountain to Maintain*, Bear Hive puts a premium on dynamics, shifting through dark and quiet guitar interludes and proggy synth doodles before bursting into the kind of dance-pop only math rockers at heart can make. — *Roy Kasten*

6 P.M. The Pat Sajak Assassins

Nominated for: Best Rock

Remember how bands like Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull and Yes are widely credited with cementing the legitimacy of the progressive-rock genre in the late '60s and early '70s? How they heralded an evolution for music? Well,

the scholars might end up saying something similar about the Pat Sajak Assassins decades from now. As a band that relies more upon instrumental layering instead of front-and-center vocals, PSA already shifts from the norm. But it's more than that — PSA also stacks synth, bass and percussion in ways that jolt listeners into truly hearing each beep and boop, setting a new standard for music composition. Played in any order, the songs become an opera fit for R2-D2, and we can't wait to welcome our new robot overlords. — *Allison Babka*

7 P.M. Al Holliday and the East Side Rhythm Band

Nominated for: Best Soul/Funk

Collinsville, Illinois, native Al Holliday made quite the splash locally with his latest effort, 2013's *Made It Through the Mill, Again*. So much so, in fact, that we named it one of the best releases of the year *and* dubbed Holliday one of the best singers in St. Louis. But superlatives aside, he and his crew, the East Side Rhythm Band, absolutely warrant your attention. Its members may only be in their twenties, but you wouldn't know it from the music, which has the depth and grit one might expect from seasoned veterans. Together, Al Holliday and Co. form one of the finest St. Louis revival bands this side of Pokey LaFarge — and that's no small feat. — *Daniel Hill*

8 P.M. Theresa Payne

Nominated for: Best R&B;

This past March, Theresa Payne found herself before a national TV audience on *The Voice*. Payne more than earned the right to be there: She is one of our city's most commanding singers, and though her version of Beyonce's "Crazy in Love" didn't woo the likes of Shakira (who, for the record, Payne can sing circles around), she isn't letting that disappointment derail her. Released this past March, "Bye Fear" is her strongest single to date: With tense strings and her killer band and backup singers

urging her on, she makes a statement of future promise that her voice will surely keep. — *Roy Kasten*

9 P.M. Dots Not Feathers

Nominated for: Best Indie Pop

Doomed romances and near-fatal arachnid venom influence the poly-genre sound of Dots Not Feathers. Guitarist Stephen Baier spins webs of unrequited crushes between the branches of Jessica Haley's spindly omnichord to the delight of listeners who covet the cool shade of spacey sounds. Keyboardist Katie Brooking ranges from dexterous to birdlike as she harmonizes with guitarist Ryan Myers' bravado-swaddled vibrato. Chris

Dickey and Nick Blackburn's bass and drum section is syncopated to imbue Baier and Myers' guitars with pummeling power. Produced by Luke Arens of Shock City Studios and mastered by Secretly Canadian's David Vandervelde, the band's latest, *Dolphin World*, takes a swing at mainstream success. On record or live, Dots Not Feathers' multi-tempo arrangements and poetic lyrics hold court over all who see and hear. — *Blair Stiles*

10 P.M. Mathias & the Pirates

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Group)

Some rappers lionize outlaw legends like Scarface; some rappers style themselves as street-smart CEOs. For his latest LP, Mathias took to the high seas and, with his aptly named crew the Pirates, set himself up as a verbal swashbuckler. Last year's *Life of the Buzzard* hit hard with old-school beats, but it was smoothed out with the help of vocalist Ms. Vizion, who serves as an oft-calming foil to Mathias' more fiery verses. Songs like "Sea Shanty in D Minor" and "The Ballad of Old Long Ben" underline the high-seas/high-adventure motif, but Mathias isn't interested in putting on costumes or playing dress-up — it's simply a new way to present the message he has been preaching for well over a decade. — *Christian Schaeffer*

The Gramophone

4 P.M. Big Brother Thunder and the Master Blasters

Nominated for: Best Soul/Funk

Being a funk band that specializes in original music isn't easy here or in any town. There are gigs if you want to be the chumps who play Stevie Wonder, P-Funk and the rest of the wedding-party hits, and what's more, you won't have to worry about trivial matters like having an actual identity. Big Brother Thunder and the Master Blasters would rather take its chances with an eclectic, horn-rich mix of hard funk, barrio soul, Latin jazz and Afro-Caribbean roots, splashing some groovy psychedelic colors in along the way. That original approach (and a ton of hard work) is starting pay off: The band was recently announced as part of this year's LouFest lineup. — *Roy Kasten*

5 P.M. Barely Free Partial Prisoners

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Group)

Depending on your perspective, Barely Free Partial Prisoners isn't a traditional hip-hop group, per se. It takes its influence from beyond the genre's walls. These are rappers bred not on the sounds of punk, but definitely on the DIY approach it preaches, with audible nods to no-wave and noise music as well. Rhymes slip through Jake Cohen's teeth in tandem, piercing with precision. Jason LaChance makes use of a theremin

and Korg software through a Nintendo DS to produce hard frames for each beat. The resulting rap speaks to conspiracy theorists and music nerds alike with cutting, clever lyricism. — *Joseph Hess*

6 P.M. CaveofswordS

Nominated for: Best Pop

If successful marriages are built around love, respect and a division of labor, Sunyatta and Kevin McDermott's union bears fruit every time CaveofswordS takes the stage. She sings with entrancing verve and laser-direct clarity; he creates atmosphere with a mix of trippy samples and visceral musicianship. Since the release of its debut *Silverwalks* (and its remix companion *Skillwavers*), the band has grown to include a living, breathing rhythm section that has added both industrial and jazzlike colors to the palette. That only makes CaveofswordS harder to pin down, genre-wise — we can think of at least five other suitable categories in this local-music horse race — and that's what makes us hungry for the band's forthcoming release, due out later this year. — *Christian Schaeffer*

7 P.M. Nato Caliph

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Solo)

Nato Caliph is a St. Louis rap OG who got his start after hearing the Eric B. & Rakim song "Microphone Fiend" when he was just seven years old. He's been rapping ever since, with an arresting cadence that propels intelligent conversation — his rhymes focus on family, work and his community, rather than turning up in the club. Most recently his song "The Id," from 2013's *Understanding Understood*, was featured on *The Source's* website. Caliph also occasionally teams up with fellow nominee Black Spade — the duo released its first joint effort in 2012, *Force Majeure*, which features beats by Spade and raps by both emcees.

— *Tara Mahadevan*

8 P.M. Mvstermind

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Solo)

Mvstermind is a growing young talent — a producer, rapper and frontman for St. Louis rapping and singing collective M.M.E. His most recent album *A.D.D. (Artistically Day Dreaming)* is just a taste of his clever wordplay, with the album's title referencing Mvstermind's childhood diagnosis of attention deficit disorder. His musical influence began at home with his father and later grew with inspiration from musicians like John Coltrane, Lupe Fiasco and Kanye West. Mvstermind sees his version of hip-hop as a

mosaic of sounds that come together to create a diverse aesthetic. — *Tara Mahadevan*

9 P.M. Illphonics

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Group)

In the four years live hip-hop band Illphonics has been releasing music, the members have figured out how to be a vibrant, funky unit while providing a platform for Larry "Fallout" Morris' verses and rhymes. The group's 2013 self-titled release jumps from bright R&B; to bouncy funk to Stevie Wonder-fied soul to Quiet Storm balladry. Kevin Koehler's increasingly versatile guitar work — alongside Keith Moore's mood-setting keys — is responsible for these dynamic shifts, while Fallout's lyricism works no matter the setting. Illphonics further proved its instrumental prowess by stripping back to an acoustic unit for a handful of recent shows.

— *Christian Schaeffer*

10 P.M. Brothers Lazaroff

Nominated for: Best Americana

Brothers Lazaroff masters a strain of American folk music that can't be faked, with a subconscious presence of blues and an unforced twang. The comparison between Brothers Lazaroff and *Summerteeth*-era Wilco is an

obvious but effective one, although these not-actually-related Brothers seem uninterested in high-art experimentation. Last year's excellent full-length record *Hope, Fear, Youth* displayed a band that infuses an often formulaic music with jangle-funk jams and Springsteenian moments that easily reach further than the standard alt-country crowd.

— *Ryan Wasoba*

11 P.M. Tef Poe

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Solo)

Of all the aspects of Tef Poe to discuss — his outspoken nature, his constant hustle, his thought-provoking social-media rants — let us not forget that he can rhyme his ass off. You don't get onto BET's Freestyle Friday competition on swagger alone, and you certainly don't return as defending champion for weeks on end without a sharp tongue and quick wit. And Poe's wordplay keeps improving on his newest release, *Cheer For the Villain*, another installment of sinister verses and steamrolling beats. A track like "Drinking and Thinking" shows zero compromises and still hits hard enough to fit on hip-hop radio. Tef Poe may or may not be the next big St. Louis rapper, but if he is, it will certainly be on his own terms. — *Ryan Wasoba*

MIDNIGHT Family Affair

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Group)

Hailing from St. Louis' north side, identical twins Mr. Rep and QB form the literally named Family Affair. The duo grew up surrounded by music — mostly gospel and hip-hop — citing Bone Thugs-n-Harmony, Outkast, Nas and 2Pac as some of its biggest influences. Mr. Rep and QB have created their own special blend of hip-hop, melding the sounds of the '90s with truthful poetics. Family Affair's music caters to pop and rap audiences alike, using its members' knack for storytelling to represent the city of St. Louis. The duo's ability to fit on a bill with a wide range of musicians — from the Isley Brothers to Big K.R.I.T. to Juelz Santana — also speaks to its unique flavor. — *Tara Mahadevan*

1 A.M. Doorway

Nominated for: Best Hip-Hop (Group)

Doorway's tale begins in Fairview Heights, Illinois, with members Nick Menn, L-Gifted, RT-FaQ and SD TheDizzleMan, who, after years of avid wordsmithing, decided to create an artist collective dedicated to hip-hop. Although each individual artist boasts a unique personality and sonic palette, they all share a devotion to sincerity and honesty, which can be seen in the messages and themes of their music. Doorway couples its members' humble attitudes with a brazen consciousness that provides the

spark for its music; the group's lyricism and sound is a study in poignancy and ingenuity that easily covers all angles of rap. As a group, Doorway has created multiple solo and joint efforts and only continues to grow. — *Tara Mahadevan*

HANDLEBAR

4 P.M. The Trophy Mules

Nominated for: Best Country

Corey Saathoff first made a name in St. Louis as part of alt-country band Jerkwater Junction and as leader of jangle-rockers Brain Regiment, but he's really hit his stride as a songwriter fronting the Trophy Mules, a flexible country-rock outfit featuring mandolin and guitar picker Larry Rosenhoffer and pedal-steel ace Scott Swartz. Saathoff doesn't write predictable alt-country fare — if there are booze and broken hearts in his songs, they're part of his stories. His style is impressionistic in the best sense, as evocative of the songs of R.E.M. as those of Jay Farrar. — *Roy Kasten*

5 P.M. The Defeated County

Nominated for: Best Americana

Langen Neubacher's voice is hard to pin down. Maybe a less precious Eleanor Friedberger or a folksy Kim Gordon? The music of her outfit the Defeated County is similarly defiant, a loosely organized exploration of dark folk themes with arrangements blurring the line between decisions and mistakes. It should be noted that Neubacher proudly owns the adjective "creepy" when describing her band. If "Americana" seems an ill-fitting category, just consider that whole melting-pot cliché — easy to do, because Langen Neubacher mischievously stirring a cauldron is not much of a stretch. — *Ryan Wasoba*

6 P.M. Indian Blanket

Nominated for: Best Folk

How do you discuss Indian Blanket without mentioning the Lion's Daughter in the same breath? Well, you don't. The pair collaborated for *A Black Sea*, a folk-metal record and last year's most intriguing local album. The unlikely combination worked because Indian Blanket's version of folk is dark, doomy and heavy in the same manner as Neil Young. There's nothing cute about principal songwriter Joe Andert's voice, an often twangless tenor that lets the tragedy of his lyrics emote for themselves. Listeners who revel in the darkness of Will Oldham will find comfort in Indian Blanket, but those excavating these nominees to find a local foil for

their love of Mumford & Sons are advised to look elsewhere. — *Ryan Wasoba*

7 P.M. Dave Stone Trio

Nominated for: Best Jazz

If you've never heard of Dave Stone, you are out of the loop. In addition to his more than twenty years of contributions to St. Louis' noise and free-improvisation scenes, Stone's trio — composed of himself, bassist Bob DeBoo and drummer Kyle Honeycutt — has got to be breaking some kind of record with its nineteen-year-long Friday night residency at Mangia Italiano. The pianoless trio — all three accomplished players in their own right — slays standards, throwing in the odd original and even a bit of free playing. If you're a jazz fan and you haven't yet seen the Dave Stone Trio, cancel your plans this Friday and head to Mangia. You won't regret it. — *Nick Horn*

8 P.M. Eric Hall

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Eclectic)

A coworker of Eric Hall once asked, "Are you a musician?" Hall reportedly replied, "No, where did you hear that?" A more accurate title for Hall may be "sonic artist," even though we wish more musicians shared his

consciousness of texture and timbre. For Eric Hall, any intentional or aleatoric noise can be electronically mangled into the spontaneous compositions of a 22nd-century orchestra. Hall furthers his each-sound-is-precious aesthetic by documenting nearly every live performance and posting the results to his Bandcamp page. For a lesser non-musician, this habit could resemble social-media oversharing, but keeping up with Eric Hall online is more like following a forward-thinking electronic-music blog than looking at pictures of your friend's salad. —

Ryan Wasoba

9 P.M. Syna So Pro

Nominated for: Best Pop

Dancing isn't technically part of Syrhea Conaway's job description as Syna So Pro. But when Conaway juggles guitars, violins and keyboard while singing and striking loop and effect pedals, it's hard to think of a Syna So Pro performance as anything less than a ballet. Newer songs typically spin out from a simple major-key riff into either atmospheric webs of melodies or stormy fuzzed-out rockers. Conaway then cuts through these dense sound clouds with a sonorous voice that possesses incredible range. The combined effect of all these elements is a feeling of both liberating release and a soothing sense of calm. — *Bob McMahon*

10 P.M. Old Salt Union

Nominated for: Best Country

It's hard not to be impressed with Old Salt Union's rise as one of the most successful of the young newgrassers in Greater St. Louis. Its members started out as kids, and they're still kids at heart, but they take their acoustic music seriously while still having a hell of a lot of fun. Along with playing every banjo-friendly festival this side of Telluride, OSU will be joining LouFest's 2014 lineup. The band also just got back from Nashville, where it finished recording its second album, funded by a \$16,000 Kickstarter campaign. In other words, Old Crow Medicine Show should keep one eye on the road and one eye in its rearview mirror. Serious competition from Belleville, Illinois, is on the way. — *Roy Kasten*

11 P.M. DJ Needles

Nominated for: Best DJ

DJ Needles' story begins in 1994, when he started DJing house parties with only tapes and CDs. Over the next few years Needles slowly began cultivating his record collection, and in 1998, he dropped his first mixtape, featuring Pete Rock, A Tribe Called Quest and Black Star. Judging by those three artists alone, it's safe to say that Needles is an underground and classic hip-hop aficionado. A Needles set covers all the bases: groove, funk,

afrobeat, house, Latin, hip-hop, '80s and '90s R&B;, soul, jazz, breakbeat and indie music. He calls his DJing style polyrhythmic, and his sets certainly live up to the descriptor. — *Tara Mahadevan*

1 A.M. Billy Brown

Nominated for: Best DJ

Billy Brown is an integral part of St. Louis' flourishing house scene. The work he and his fellow local club rumblers put forth enables St. Louis to garner attention from global trap and bass phenomenons, including Diplo, Baauer and A-Trak. From his and Corey Ography's Get Serious throwdowns at Atomic Cowboy to Jay Fay's insertion into the national conversation, St. Louis' homegrown talents are many, but it is Brown's potent beat cocktail that puts him ahead of the pack. Billy Brown culls '90s B-list pop samples and bubbling beats, spewing out ebullient blips of afro-trance and Europop in the place of reckless turntablism. — *Blair Stiles*

JOYIA TAPAS

10 P.M. Ransom Note

Nominated for: Soul/Funk

Big Soul is an appropriate title for Ransom Note's fine second LP. The lineup of this group can swell to eight or nine members, and its latest batch

of songs can be as smooth as 1,000-threadcount silk sheets or as vital and sizzling as any guitar-based rock band in town. Merv Schrock remains a commanding presence on the record, with a voice that can be expressively raspy or sweetly honeyed. "Russian Blue" floats like a lullaby, while "Are You Waiting" finds his bandmates locked in on a steely (Steely?) groove. The record is a good step forward for Ransom Note, but the live stage is where these songs take flight. — *Christian Schaeffer*

11 P.M. Brotherfather

Nominated for: Best Indie Pop

Looking past the occasional harmonic quirk, the tension in Brotherfather's music comes from the band's restraint. We know these guys can wail — Chris Turnbaugh handled bass duties in local progressive band Groupthink, and Dustin Sholtes drummed in the jazzy math rock outfit Primary Colors — but the quartet chooses to lay back for the majority of its debut *Walk It Off*, spotlighting John Krane's conversational delivery, comparable to a twangless Jeff Tweedy. When the instrumentalists take over, Nicholas Horn's fuzz-bathed guitar leads the group into Pavement-esque explosions, proving Brotherfather would rather self-destruct than self-indulge. — *Ryan Wasoba*

MIDNIGHT Dance Floor Riot

Nominated for: Best Cover/Tribute Band

Dance Floor Riot would have you know that it was the first band to christen the stage at Ballpark Village in St. Louis. DFR is right to be proud of that gig opening for Third Eye Blind, and it deserves props for being one of the most eclectic cover bands in town. Led by singers Mike Alexander and Brandon Wicks, DFR applies its straight-ahead rock approach to a dizzying range of covers from every genre this side of bluegrass. Tackling 2Pac, the Black Keys, Macklemore, Muse and even some classic rock by the likes of Bon Jovi and the Beatles, the band is nothing if not unpredictable in its mission to give the party what it wants: the hits. — *Roy Kasten*

Layla Lebanese Restaurant

7 P.M. Ellen the Felon

Nominated for: Best Singer/Songwriter

Last November finally saw the release of *Bang Bang Bang*, the long-awaited debut album by pianist/vocalist Ellen Cook (better known as Ellen the Felon). A record of experience born out of a few turbulent years, *Bang Bang Bang* translated tragedy into a complex but danceable melange of boogie rock, jazz, tango and slow balladry. All of the ornate arrangements are balanced out by a rocking left hand that pounds the low notes and a playful vocal delivery that make Cook's shows a blast. Showgoers can expect

inspired covers and mischievous banter alongside her formidable chops. —
Bob McMahon

8 P.M. Chris Ward/Acorns to Oaks

Nominated for: Best Singer/Songwriter

Between hosting *loudQUIETloud* on KDHX (88.1 FM) and co-hosting his live interactive game show *Loser at the Heavy Anchor*, Chris Ward hasn't made a lot of time for his Acorns to Oaks project lately. But when he does play, Ward holds nothing back. Flying mostly solo, sometimes accompanied by former St. Louisan Kate Peterson Koch, Ward summons the intensity of a full band when he strikes chords, stomps on a bass drum and emphatically hollers tales alternately hilarious, abstract and gut-wrenchingly sad. Acorns to Oaks employs folk strumming patterns and melodies but pummels them with a fervor that's pure rock & roll. Even quiet moments brim with emotion and always build to a thrilling conclusion. In short, Chris Ward is the perfect singer/songwriter for those who hate singer/songwriters. — *Bob McMahon*

9 P.M. Matt Harnish's Pink Guitar

Nominated for: Best Cover/Tribute Band

With Bunnygrunt currently relegated to part-time status, owing to bassist Karen Ried's move to Cincinnati, lead singer/guitarist Matt Harnish has taken the opportunity to go solo for the first time. The format of Matt Harnish's Pink Guitar is fairly self-explanatory: It's mostly him (sometimes with a few friends) and a cheap semi-acoustic guitar playing some of his favorite songs in a stripped-down style. The setlist often resembles a playlist from a clued-in college DJ, with selections from the likes of Camper Van Beethoven, Game Theory, Pooh Sticks and Mountain Goats. There's usually a Sparks medley at some point in the show, and occasionally Harnish's fiancée joins him for a duet of "You're the Reason Our Kids Are Ugly." Charmingly low-key and obviously a labor of love. — *Mike Appelstein*

O'Shay's Pub

4 P.M. Con Trails

Nominated for: Best New Band

Rather than save their songs (and their dollars) to release a full-length, capital-A Album, the fellows in Con Trails are happy to work in short, frequent bursts. The duo, composed of Kevin Guskowski and Luke Sapa, has released three EPs, each with two or three songs, each month. Every release finds the experimentally inclined band using guitars and drums to craft sometimes-creamy, sometimes-discordant songs that can float like

shoegaze or hit like post-punk. The group's most recent release, *Tunnel Prey*, weaves in dark, muddy tones to offer up some brutality amid the bliss. — *Christian Schaeffer*

5 P.M. Boreal Hills

Nominated for: Best Garage Rock

Boreal Hills manages to sound utterly stoned and utterly wired as its members slash through the sub-three-minute jams on last year's *Dope Hugz*. The band members care more than you'd guess from titles like "Belcher" and "Ripped Jeans," and what they care about are noisy no-wave tunes, art-punk à la Pere Ubu, '50s wild-man rockabilly yelps and slapback blasted through the cracked windows of whatever filthy rehearsal space sired such a convincing and appropriately filthy fuzz-punk sound. The band recently scored a Daytrotter session, and more national attention is surely in the offing in the months to come. — *Roy Kasten*

6 P.M. Willis

Nominated for: Best New Band

If the Shaggs had grown up with Casios, Donkey Kong and *The Blair Witch Project*, the band might have sounded like lo-fi experimental act Willis. The trio of sisters Milena and Bella Kanak, along with fellow St. Clair, Illinois,

pal Paige Smyth, barely makes music — unless you count chanting about Bobby Fischer and banging on a pot music — but what they do make is truly original, in the way that the best spontaneous sonic weirdness can be. Even as the St. Louis underground experimental scene flourishes, the darkly funny, sometimes downright disturbing words, noises and loops made by Willis sound like nothing else in this town — or any other, for that matter.

— *Roy Kasten*

7 P.M. The Maness Brothers

Nominated for: Best Blues

Jake and David Maness grew up in O'Fallon, but they're too young to remember the heyday of KSHE (94.7 FM), when classic rock meant as much blues as Southern or progressive rock, when Cream, Hendrix and Zeppelin helped define radio for a generation. But this duo caught wind of the blues all the same, channeling it into a thundering, radio-friendly sound that is indebted to the likes of the Black Keys and the White Stripes, but with a distinctly dirty, even underclass, Missouri tone. And that's a good thing. On the 2012 EP *Grief Factory*, the Manesses exalt catfish, rivers and guns, and throw themselves into every howling jam. — *Roy Kasten*

8 P.M. The Union Electric

Nominated for: Best Folk

The word "supergroup" is a bit of a stretch for the Union Electric. Still, the core of seasoned, prolific musicians Tim Rakel, Mic Boshans, Glenn Burleigh and Melinda Cooper — along with a revolving door of quality guests onstage and on record — does carry some hints of indie-rock collectives like the New Pornographers and Broken Social Scene. Where those examples can struggle for authenticity when dabbling in Americana themes (blame Canada), the Union Electric's Midwest roots shine through, even when the band's mind is elsewhere — like the beach, for example, on the surf-rock indebted "From Bad to Worstward." The Union Electric may not be the folkiest folk band in the folk category, but it is certainly the most effortless about its folksiness. — *Ryan Wasoba*

9 P.M. Aquitaine

Nominated for: Best Indie Rock

It's another lazy summer Saturday afternoon in St. Louis. You're looking for the perfect soundtrack for hitting the hammock with a cool Arnold Palmer after tending your organic kale garden and playing fetch with your Saint Berdoodle. There's a perfect soundtrack somewhere for you, but it sure as fuck isn't Aquitaine. With guitars cranked to eleven to the eleventh power and all the harmonic texture of the Brit-pop-loving bands it aims to rock swirls around, Aquitaine puts it all out there. Not content to release just one CD called *American Pulverizer*, the band put out *American Pulverizer-Part*

2 this year — fans of loud, expert guitar rock would do well to check it out.

— *Roy Kasten*

10 P.M. Fumer

Nominated for: Best Hard Rock

St. Louis might as well be built on an ancient burial ground for grunge-rock gods of ages past. Fumer worships at the altar with crippling volume, choosing to gut showgoers with warbling bass. The drummer plays his kick with a lead foot, leading each song with colossal heft. While Fumer teeters on the edge of rock and metal, the band rarely ventures far into the latter, with most songs sitting in half-time — a comfortable 90 or so BPM, the perfect tempo for a full-body head-bang. — *Joseph Hess*

Outdoor Stage

2 P.M. Cree Rider Family Band

Nominated for: Best Country

Consider Cree Rider this city's preeminent practitioner of modular folk. Rider works well in any setting he chooses — as a solo act; accompanied by his fiancée, Cheryl Wheeler; as a member of the trio ARR!; or fully formed with his Family Band. It's to Rider's credit that his voice, gentle and rooted, is convincing and compelling regardless of who plays alongside him. Both

on album and in concert, Rider and Wheeler are joined by some of St. Louis' most apt and empathetic players, including Dave Grelle, Bryan Ranney, Andy Coco and Jordan Heimberger. But on last year's *One Night Stand*, Rider takes center stage, singing story songs with wit and empathy.
— *Christian Schaeffer*

3 P.M. The People's Key

Nominated for: Best Jazz

As the band's egalitarian-sounding name suggests, the People's Key is in the business of bringing jazz to the masses by building a repertoire of — as the band's own bio calls them — "new standards." Using songs by artists such as the Beach Boys, Radiohead, Queen and Michael Jackson as vehicles for improvisation, the People's Key continues the jazz tradition of fusing contemporary popular music with high-level musicianship and improvisational wit, putting on a show that appeals to music nerds and casual listeners alike. — *Nick Horn*

4 P.M. The Educated Guess

Nominated for: Best Indie Pop

The filter between Charlie Brumley's brain and his piano-playing, arrangement-writing hands is mercifully brief. In the past year alone, he's

birthed the ambitious, genre-blurring rock opera *Chrono Man*, played keys alongside such disparate acts as Volcanoes and Via Dove, and led a stage full of musicians in tribute to Marvin Gaye. But the home base for Brumley's ideas resides in the ambitious, Americana-pop leaning Educated Guess, which has been a going concern for some time now. With the band, he can play tight, tuneful rock songs and allow them to stretch out with the aid of horns, strings and a trio of female vocalists. — *Christian Schaeffer*

5 P.M. Scarlet Tanager

Nominated for: Best Indie Pop

The self-proclaimed "Most Adorable Indie-Pop Band in St. Louis" has already toyed with taking itself to the next level (i.e. MTV series song placement, viral YouTube videos), but 2014 may turn out to be its biggest year yet. With the impending release of its second full-length, *Let's Love*, to be released on June 20, fans may as well cancel their Paxil and Zoloft prescriptions and let the band's artfully crafted, feel-good pop tunes do the work. But as strong as its songs are, it's the band's joyous live show that truly sets it apart. When you go to a concert and the folks onstage are having just as much fun as everyone else in the room, you know you're at the right show. — *Michael Dauphin*

6 P.M. The Night Grinder

Nominated for: Best Noise

Noise tends to be the garbage bin where music that is too hard to define piles up. The Night Grinder's treasure is another man's trash, and sole member Brad Schumacher picks up the pieces. By forcing chopped beats through a twisted funnel of white noise, Schumacher builds a bed for smooth bass lines to lay. Arguments play out onstage between feedback and subtle tones while the audience stands by, either confused or involved. In the Night Grinder's music, faux kraut rock meets Japanese electronica to form some axis power of danceable concrete.

— *Joseph Hess*

7 P.M. Middle Class Fashion

Nominated for: Best Pop

It's been a breakout year for Middle Class Fashion. With the August 2013 release of *Jungle*, this quartet took its place as one of the area's best bands. Lead singer/pianist Jenn Malzone, already an impressive songwriter, outdid herself, wrapping lyrical sentiments of loneliness and cynicism in increasingly streamlined, hook-laden compositions. MCF has done some touring, shot a few videos and had its song "Stuck" featured on the public-radio series *This American Life*. Most recently, the band contributed "Focus" to a split seven-inch single (with Sleepy Kitty) on Tower Groove

Records. Malzone's most recent songs suggest further ambition and experimentation. Live, its shows are engaging and fun. — *Mike Appelstein*

The Ready Room

2 P.M. Kadu Flyer

Nominated for: Best Psych

A new band full of familiar faces, Kadu Flyer is a fine addition to St. Louis' psych scene. Many of its songs embrace the inherent silliness of the genre. "Light Bright Resolve" features the lyrics "We're outta outer space, man" along with an echo-laden chant of its title. But the band also boasts exquisite bent leads that sound perfect coming through fuzz and wah-wah pedals. These effects shape Flyer's skyward trajectory by adding welcome color to the driving riffs, and they should only get cooler now that Physics Punk Pedals head-honcho Gerald Good has joined the band. Maybe the repetitive builds showcased in early sets will someday return, but for now Kadu Flyer is grooving at the intersection of psychedelica and pop-rock. — *Bob McMahon*

3 P.M. Tone Rodent

Nominated for: Best Psych

Tone Rodent has been blessing St. Louis with its dark psych magic since the dawn of this millennium. Despite plenty of lineup turnover, the group has developed a consistent identity of a moody space-rock beast with predilections for harsh electronics and occasional driving tempos. Sometimes the band's roots as an ambient project peek through, but now these drones tend to set the table for heavy blasts of scorching guitar and chilly synths. Peppered atop these loud soundscapes are ethereal effects and Adam Watkins' disaffected voice. It all adds up to a menacing cyberpunk vibe. If androids could have bad acid trips, their hallucinations would sound like Tone Rodent. — *Bob McMahon*

4 P.M. Bug Chaser

Nominated for: Best Psych

Most psych bands sound like the only hallucinogens at hand are a handful of Dramamine and some leftover bong water. Bug Chaser's psychedelic trip recalls the earliest and noisiest approach of the Flaming Lips and probably a hundred underground bands nobody but its members are cool enough to know. The sound of its latest album, *Sexual Forecast*, is utter anarchy in the STL. The band careens between total guitar mayhem, melodic keyboard textures, riffage for the sake of riffage and any and all satanic majesty's requests. It's a trip you and your earplugs won't regret. — *Roy Kasten*

5 P.M. Tok

Nominated for: Best Hard Rock

Two decades into a career is an odd time for a band to be in its prime, but that's where Tok is. Part of this is explained by the fact that the group formed when brothers Bryan and Matt Basler were adolescents, but it's mostly because the two of them are now writing the best music of their lives. The duo's sound is the missing link between classic '70s punk and '90s grunge, with some epic guitar heroics thrown in (rapid-fire solos never sounded so smooth). But Tok's pop sensibilities would fit in any era because its members have honed their ability to make superb hooks flow naturally into each other. Simply put, Tok's take on rock just feels right. — *Bob McMahon*

6 P.M. Old Capital Square Dance Club

Nominated for: Best Country

There's more than a little bit of cheekiness to the moniker Old Capital Square Dance Club, a name that conjures the sonic version of a browned Wild West photo souvenir from Six Flags rather than a good ol' American rock band with traces of Tom Petty and the Stones. The group, spearheaded by singers/songwriters Jesse McClary and Zach Anderson, has recently justified the "Club" portion of Old Capital Square Dance Club by morphing

into a collective of sorts — notably adding multi-instrumental virtuoso-in-the-making Zagk Gibbons, whose first name is not a typo. OCSDC shows range from acoustic songwriting showcases to seven-piece band jams. The fact that the band's songs work in such a variety of formats reinforces the strength and depth of McClary and Anderson's melodies and wordplay. — *Ryan Wasoba*

7 P.M. Capone

Nominated for: Best Cover/Tribute Band

So you've got a wedding this summer, and you forgot to book the band. No problem. St. Louis has no shortage of cover bands that can play all the wedding-party hits without offending the patriarch who paid for the gig or making the bridal party frown because the tuxes don't match. A bit of advice, though: Capone is probably not the cover band for you. The members of Capone don't just pay tribute to '80s hair metal — Guns N' Roses, Poison, Skid Row and Mötley Crüe for starters — they *are* '80s hair metal, down to the over-the-top stage shows complete with scarf-draped microphones and leather-clad strippers (or close enough to be strippers). The band really is the next best thing to being there — when "there" is the glory days of fist-thrusting, booty-twisting, guitar-strutting rock & roll. — *Roy Kasten*

8 P.M. Jack Grelle

Nominated for: Best Country

As long as St. Louis has had punk music, it's had musicians like Jack Grelle who have crossed the lines between punk and roots cultures and figured out how to make something new out of where they're coming from. Finding a home on the Big Muddy Records label, Grelle gives an outsider's edge to country music that fits right in with that label's Midwestern punk-blues ethos. He's a clever, natural storyteller with a voice that recalls gravelly John Prine, and with the Johnson Family Band behind him, he's getting better and better at the essence of hillbilly music — to make you dance, drink and leave your cares outside the honky-tonk door. — *Roy Kasten*

10 P.M. So Many Dynamos

(Headlining Show: \$15 for admission, or \$10 if purchased with a Showcase wristband)

So Many Dynamos has been performing in St. Louis for over a decade now. Once a part of Vagrant Records' lineup and now a free agent, the band's *Flashlights* and *Loud Wars* LPs are uniquely excellent St. Louis records — truly standouts among standouts. An indie-rock group combining aspects of electro-pop and dance-punk, the band's expanded lineup has guitarist/keyboardist Stephen Inman and percussionist Alison Arida

joining guitarist/keyboardist Nathan Bernaix and founding members Aaron Stovall (keyboardist/guitarist) and Clayton "Norm" Kunstel (drummer). So Many Dynamos is currently sitting on a much-anticipated upcoming release, the *Safe With Sound* LP, which was recorded in summer of 2013. It will be the band's fourth full-length. — *Daniel Hill*

11 P.M. Pokey LaFarge

(Headlining Show: \$15 for admission, or \$10 if purchased with a Showcase wristband)

Pokey LaFarge is a bit of a legend around these parts (and beyond), playing sincere, passionate American roots music with a five-piece band at his side. A veteran STL musician who honed his craft releasing albums with St. Louis' venerable Big Muddy Records (well known as the home/family of Bob Reuter), LaFarge is now signed to Jack White's venerable Third Man label. He and his band have made performances on the *Late Show with David Letterman*, Jools Holland on New Year's Eve, on the soundtrack to HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* and more. — *Daniel Hill* Taha'a Twisted Tiki

7 P.M. DJ MAKossa

Nominated for: Best DJ

DJ MAKossa borrowed his name from a type of Cameroonian music that, to him, symbolizes his Afro-centric style. Armed with a record collection that numbers in the thousands, funkmaster MAKossa has been on the scene for more than a decade, and his sets specialize in funk (duh), soul, reggae and hip-hop. He's prominent on the DJ and dance scene — "Makossa" also means "dance" in Duala, one of Cameroon's native languages — and he's a founding member of several DJ nights including San Francisco's AFREAKA!, the West Coast-based Funky Rewind and St. Louis' very own Bump & Hustle. — *Tara Mahadevan*

8 P.M. 3 of 5

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Dance)

Andrew Garces is a geek. This isn't a slam, just a fact made inescapable when he performs songs about Mass Effect creatures while clad in a *Star Trek* uniform. This nerdy niche shapes Garces' work as 3 of 5 both lyrically and musically, as his tunes are programmed in Rhythm Core Alpha, an application for his 3DS. So Garces' four-on-the-floor bass-drum hits, bubbly sixteenth-note synth runs and bouncy counter melodies come in the form of the bleeps and buzzes associated with video-game music. Thankfully, there's a depth behind all the nerd posturing, for the sci-fi trappings are often a vehicle for universal themes like friendship and

accepting oneself. Or, as Garces sings, "But inside all this circuitry there beats an honest heart." — *Bob McMahon*

9 P.M. it!

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Dance)

The electronic-dance duo it! works hard to earn the exclamation point in its title. Joel Kern (guitar, drums and vocals) and Andrew Bohler (drums and vocals) make party music for a generation that takes the through-being-cool message of LCD Soundsystem as a birthright and treats dancefloor hedonism as a religion. You won't find deep meaning or particularly ambitious production on the handful of digital singles that it! has deployed in the past few years (though last year's "Satell(it!)e" gets in on some millennial paranoia). Instead, it! would rather you just dance and drink and screw — because there's nothing else to do. — *Christian Schaeffer*

10 P.M. 18andCounting

Nominated for: Best DJ

18andCounting, a.k.a. Stan Chisholm, is a multifaceted mastermind tearing around St. Louis' art scene with radioactive energy. Recently, he has treated Cherokee's Blank Space to his healthy collection of wax — every second Thursday of the month he participates in Lord Have Merzy, a monthly

event bringing Chisholm and his contemporaries together to host a series of sets crafted for all who love to dance from St. Louis and beyond. Chisholm can also be spotted at the Royale about three crates deep, with sets that span everything from English psych-rock to rap samples texturized with crackling instrumental overdub. — *Blair Stiles*

11 P.M. Golden Curls

Nominated for: Best Electronic (Eclectic)

Golden Curls marks the second collaboration between singer/keyboardist Sarah Downen and guitarist/keyboardist Noah Blackwell. Their prior project was Robert Ritter's twinkling Bear (the Ghost). Through a series of Wi-Fi connections, the duo constructs gossamerlike ambiance that slips in and out of lucid consciousness. Glockenspiels, an organ and Downen's palpable exhalations give Golden Curls a glitter-coated sheen that shimmers within its diaphanous textures. Here, everything feels warm, almost sun-soaked, in the disorienting effect of Golden Curls' balmy reverb. Like the gauzy slow burn of summer, Golden Curls' *Warm Fiction EP* unwinds as percussion and waning analog synthesizers caramelize under Downen's vocals. — *Blair Stiles*

Urban Chestnut Grove Brewery & Bierhall

3 P.M. Googolplexia

Nominated for: Best Singer/Songwriter

Part clever pop musician, part standup comedian and part performance artist, Robert Severson juggles as many roles as he does instruments when performing as Googolplexia. And oh, does he juggle instruments! One song may be accordion-fueled French pop, the next a ukulele-driven rocker and the third a funky number made of nothing but stomps, claps and Severson's expressive voice. Good luck trying to ignore him as he saunters through the crowd, belting with impressive vocal range through his signature headset. All of these disparate styles are filtered through Severson's infectiously silly lyrical sensibilities, delivered with utter conviction — and those ditties about Mayor McCheese, paladins and dating zombies will get stuck in your head. — *Bob McMahon*

4 P.M. Letter to Memphis

Nominated for: Best Folk

For guitarist Gene Starks and vocalist/ukelelist Devon Cahill, Letters to Memphis began as a reason to learn and play the works of some of their favorite songwriters, including Jenny Lewis, M. Ward, Jeff Mangum and Camera Obscura's Tracianne Campbell. When the duo started writing its own songs, they were in a traditional style, with elements of folk, country and blues. Now augmented by a full band and a steadily growing cache of

fine original material, Letters to Memphis has become a fixture in the city's live music community. Songs like "The Oleatha Shuffle" (about the street where Cahill and Starks live) and "Rest Your Head" are whimsical, even playful in nature. However, it's the smokier, slower material, like "Time" and "Your Eyes and Mine," that really suggest great things to come in the near future. — *Mike Appelstein*

5 P.M. Lizzie Weber

Nominated for: Best Singer/Songwriter

Normally, you would be awarded zero points for noting that a young, female singer/songwriter comfortable on both guitar and piano is reminiscent of Joni Mitchell. Be real: *Blue* and *Court and Spark* are required listening for all, genre be damned. But on Lizzie Weber's debut, self-titled LP, she shows flashes of Joni's wit and knife-sharp emotional observations alongside gentle but sure-footed piano arpeggios. On the album, Weber works through the vagaries of early-twenties existential crises with an open heart and a clarion voice. She has recently begun airing these songs at locales around town with her backing band, the Magnolias. — *Christian Schaeffer*